



Munich Personal RePEc Archive

## **Socialism without liberation: Land Reclamation Projects in Guinea-Bissau**

Kohnert, Dirk

GIGA - German Institute of Global and Area Studies /  
Institute of African Affairs

January 1988

Online at <http://mpa.ub.uni-muenchen.de/16497/>  
MPRA Paper No. 16497, posted 28. July 2009 / 15:07

# Socialism without liberation

## Land Reclamation Projects in Guinea-Bissau

Dirk Kohnert<sup>1</sup>

National liberation, the struggle against colonialism ... will be empty words without significance for the people, unless they are translated into real improvement of the conditions of life. (Amilcar Cabral 1956)

**Abstract:** One of the outstanding aims of most liberation movements has been to increase the economic well-being of their people, Guinea-Bissau being no exception in this respect. How far has the new Nation State succeeded in fulfilling this aim? A comparative analysis of the implementation of land reclamation projects during colonial and post-colonial times reveals astonishing similarities: especially the centralization of development efforts in the hands of administrators disconnected from the grassroots, lack of target group analysis and misconceptions about the aims and needs, as well as the resources, of the population involved in the development efforts, on the part of the administration. The effects of this negative conditioning process of 'development' over many years on the chances of cooperation between peasants and the administration are still largely unknown. Any development planner who wants to encourage the local population to take their future into their own hands, would have to take account of this negative conditioning process.

**Keywords:** rural development, rice farming, land reclamation, colonialism, socialism, Guinea-Bissau, West Africa

**JEL Classifications:** O12, O15, O18, O21, O38, O55, P21, P32, P51, Z13

Working Paper: a revised version was published in *Sociologia Ruralis*, 28 (1988) 2/3: 161-175

---

<sup>1</sup> Consultant for regional planning, Ministry of Planning, Bissau, 1985-86; and for GTZ/CARDER Atlantique, Cotonou, R.P. Benin 1987-90; since 1991 Institute of African Affairs, German Institute of Global and Area Studies, Hamburg; e-mail: [Kohnert@giga-hamburg.de](mailto:Kohnert@giga-hamburg.de)

One of the outstanding aims of most liberation movements has been to increase the economic well-being of their people, Guinea-Bissau being no exception in this respect. How far has the new Nation State succeeded in fulfilling this aim? In this regard Guinea-Bissau provides the unique opportunity to answer the question by means of a comparative analysis of one and the same type of development projects, its execution and success, during colonial and post-colonial times.

Among the economic aims of the new Guinea State self-sufficiency in staple food production was given priority, in order to reduce dependency on food imports, improve the food supply of the urban population and conditions of life in general. Under the special ecological, socio-economic and cultural conditions of the country the growth of rice production has been considered to be the most promising way out of the perpetual food crisis, like in colonial times. The agricultural census of 1953 stated for example that wet rice was the most lucrative of all staple foods for the indigenous producer, because the yield per hectare in the rice polders was estimated to be about three times as high as in the dry upland rice fields (Mota 1954, 2:151), and because only 45% of the economically cultivable area had been used in 1953 (Cabral 1956:37, 41).

Therefore, it is not surprising that the rehabilitation of rice polders (*bolanhas salgadas*), abandoned since the establishment of Colonial Rule for a variety of socio-economic reasons, counted among the most important agricultural development projects under the Portuguese as well as under the post-independence government. However, a preliminary evaluation of these projects which is still under way, revealed serious problems concerning economic viability for the peasants as well as 'cultural barriers' to acceptance of the newly gained *bolanhas*. This was by no means a new insight. Already in the 1950s the Portuguese Colonial [161] Administration was stressing the importance of ecological investigation to overcome difficulties in the execution of similar projects (Mota 1951:672/73). The present contribution is meant to highlight the socio-economic problems caused by the articulation of different modes of production within the sphere of land reclamation projects in Guinea-Bissau, as well as reasons for the incapacity of the development administration, before and after independence, to cope with these problems.

### **The communal mode of production in the *bolonhas***

During the past four or five centuries the Papels, Manjacos, and Balanta in the littoral regions of Guinea-Bissau developed a highly sophisticated system of drainage and irrigation of their riverside marshland (*bolanhas*) which seems to be unique in West Africa. First references to the existence of *bolanhas* in the region of Cacheu were included in the accounts of the early Portuguese commanders of the 17th century<sup>1</sup>. Captain Martins, who visited the country in 1831 in search of profitable investments for the Portuguese, was surprised by the rich potential of swamp rice cultivation in the Biombo region, where the local kings and rich landlords lived by 'heavy taxation of their poor labourers and frequent wars' (Faro 1958:207). Whereas the technical aspects of this production system have been described already in detail, the social organization has been little known up to now. The communal organization of the principal activities on these rice

polders, that is construction of dikes, irrigation canals and gates, maintenance and so on, by village elders and age groups, the interrelationship between participation in these activities and the distribution of land and production, and the (extended) family cultivation of different parcels of the polder seem to be the main characteristics of production in the *bolanhas* (Hochet 1979a: 26-38; 1979b: 10-16, 28/29; Handem 1986), predominantly of the Balanta in the south. This production system has been undermined seriously, however, by the effects of the Liberation War as will be seen.

Among the Papels and Manjacos of the north the communal mode of production in the *bolanhas* has been closely interwoven with a 'semi-feudal' superstructure. Local kings (*regulos*) and religious heads (*jamba-cosses*) dominated the social organization of the works, and appropriated vast stretches of fertile marshland as royal land (*bens de realeza*). In the local kingdom of the Costa de Baixo for example, in 1945 still existed 132 *bolanhas* which were exploited as *bens de realeza* - 77 directly by the family of the local ruler, and 55 rented out to others. These traditional estates and their usufruct were one of the main reasons for disputes between different royal families over the chieftainship (Carreira 1951:44). [162]

The local rulers, often connected with secret societies hostile to the colonial administration, demanded tribute in kind and in labour for their services as mediators between the supernatural world and the population to protect the *bolanhas*, for example by religious-magic ceremonies before planting and harvesting. According to Mota (1951) the principles of social organization of the Papels and Manjacos are probably related to the organization of secret societies.

The colonial administrators tried to put an end to these feudal reminiscences, but in vain (Carreira 1951:53/54). *Bens de realeza* existed up to independence, even if to a lesser extent, in the Biombo and Cacheu regions. However, the traditional social structure was at least partially destroyed by the colonial mode of production, notably by the deposing of many ancient rulers, with the consequent lack of religious-magic protection for the dikes and irrigation systems. Carreira (1946, 1951) holds that each vacant post of local ruler at that time accounted for dozens of abandoned *bolanhas*. Without such protection<sup>2</sup>, many Manjacos or Papels do not dare to work on the *bolanhas* even today. In the region of Cacheu the widely-known myth on the *bolanha* of Qui (included in Hochet 1980b:45) explains why, even today, few peasants dare to cultivate the 'royal' *bolanhas* without permission from the *regulo*. On the other hand some local kings and elders managed at the same time to secure private title to vast stretches of land, either belonging to their former 'royal land' or the newly reclaimed *bolanhas*. Thus for example the *regulo* of Biombo, who owned no land in the Ondame region, gained the greatest part of the *bolanha* of Picle, the reclamation of which he supervised in the 1950s.

### **Reclamation of *bolanhas* in colonial times**

Since the beginning of World War II we can observe a more or less steady decline of commercialized rice production in Guinea-Bissau. Whereas the country exported rice in considerable quantities before and during the war, especially to Portugal and to the Cap Verdes, these exports diminished gradually in the 1950s and came completely to a halt in 1960s. Whether this indicates decreasing rice production overall or substitution of official export production by production for the local smuggling, barter trade with

neighboring countries or subsistence is not known. But we may safely conclude that up to 1960 the country was more or less self-sufficient in rice production. Since the early 1960s, when for the first time rice had to be imported in appreciable quantities, an ever increasing import trend became apparent.

These macro-economic trends are reflected in the micro-economic sphere as well. The peasants of Ondame, a traditional Papel rice growing village in Biombo region, relate for example that before 1948 they sold about 60 tons of rice annually to the three retailers in their village and used [163] to barter rice for cattle in the neighbouring isle of Pecixe as well. Since 1948 they stopped these sales, and from 1956 on an inverse movement was observed, each merchant of Ondame buying 5 tons of imported rice weekly in Bissau, which he resold in the village. Between 1970 and 1973 one of them could even sell 5 tons of rice from Bissau twice a week in Ondame (Hochet 1980:6/7). Not every stratum within the village was equally affected, however. Contrary to widespread assumption, village society even in the relatively egalitarian Guinea-Bissau is not a homogeneous socio-economic entity. Rich peasants were self-sufficient even in bad years, and could barter their surplus for basic consumer goods which were much in demand. Poor peasants on the other hand often could not even save seed for the next season (*ibid*: 7/8). According to own inquiries in March 1986 the range of rice production per family in the great *bolanha* of Picle, bordering Ondame to the south and west, varied between 20 and 300 bushels. The two large fields of the local king of this region in Picle provided him with an income of 1.000 bushels in 1985, according to his own estimates. It appears that up to the end of colonial rule (1971-73), when the same *regulo*, as he said, owned two huge granaries filled to the roof with rice, the socio-economic differences were at least equally pronounced.

This picture of decreasing food production since the end of colonial rule is quite familiar to the observer of other African countries. What do we know about its determinants, apart from the different resource position of the peasants mentioned above? We may distinguish with respect to Guinea-Bissau between two principal phases of development: the first relates to the wave of abandoned *bolanhas* in early colonial times, the second to the effects of the war of liberation, to ecological changes in the 1960s and 1970s, and to the new economic policy which will be analysed below.

In the aftermath of the 'pacification' of their colony (since about 1915) the Portuguese observed a 'miraculous' decline of swamp rice production. Their analyses revealed two principal causes for abandoning the ancient *bolanhas*. First, the spread of groundnut production, which in many parts of the colony had been replacing rice cultivation gradually since the middle of the 19th century, accelerated between 1915 and 1935. It had devastating ecological side effects, which was one reason for the massive wave of Balanta emigrants from the north to the south of the country, and the consequent lack of manpower to maintain the infrastructure of the rice polders of Cacheu, Oio, and Biombo region (Mota 1950:164/65; Ribeiro 1985). Certainly there were other no less convincing reasons for the migration, such as the especially heavy taxation and recruitment of forced labour in the northern districts (Carreira 1951:262), the attraction of the nearby capital and the insecurity of land tenure under the existing 'semi-feudal' production systems of the Papels and Manjacos. The second determinant was the partial destruction of the traditional social system by the Portuguese described above.

In the paternalistic view of the colonialists, it was only natural that the colonial administration, or one of its local representatives, had to take the place of the deposed

traditional rulers in organizing the maintenance and rehabilitation of the abandoned *bolanhas*. For, it was said, the organization requires 'authority, discipline, and resources... it is therefore, necessary that the administrative authorities have to intervene increasingly in the economic life of the native tribes... the tribal organization is vanishing, yielding in view of the provincial administration' (Santareno 1957:367/68). Apparently the time of self-help and local participation slogans was still to come. Thus, this period may be considered as the beginning of the ever-increasing involvement of the state in the rural development process in Guinea-Bissau, implying the substitution of self-initiative and local planning capacity by a centralized apparatus, administered by the 'state class', disconnected from basic local aims, needs and resources.

The objective of the land reclamation projects was not just to increase production and export of rice, but also to augment the purchasing power of the peasantry and thus their ability to pay taxes into the coffers of the Portuguese, and last not least to 'educate' the 'uncivilized' natives. The latter was apparently considered to be especially important for the rebellious Papels of Biombo, said to be 'disrespectful and indolent'. They had, therefore, to become accustomed to the virtues of civilization, especially discipline and rigid rules, as an anonymous Portuguese administrator stated.

The increasing incidence of abandoned *bolanhas* made it imperative for the colonialists to intervene immediately. In 1946, the first year of the campaign, a total of 7000 ha of land had been reclaimed, which was said to represent an increase in rice production of about 6000 tons. There were more than 60 projects of this kind with about 10,000 ha and a total of 90 km of dikes recorded one year later. But the actual number of project 'as probably higher because many of them, especially in the Catio region had not been recorded officially (Mota 1948:121). The works were conducted with great élan on the part of administrators and local rulers. The latter expressed their satisfaction with the progress of the projects which, they said, were the most important ones since the time of Teixeira Pinto (the wars of colonial conquest in Biombo), as stated proudly in the Colonial Reports. Their subjects apparently were not quite so pleased. The same reports deplored certain 'social difficulties' in the execution of the projects, because of the lack of interest on the part of the natives, who had 'yet to get accustomed to work', although the projects were meant to serve their proper interest. In big projects like the reclamation of the *bolanha* of Picle (1500 ha), where 14 km of dikes had to be reconstructed [165] in 45 days, thousands of peasants had to participate. In other medium sized *bolanhas*, like Ponta Vincente de Mata, 4000 man-days were required to reconstruct 80 ha of rice polders. But labour inputs oscillated considerably between 1.3 and 50 man-days per ha, corresponding to the different kinds of work executed.

Fortunately a detailed account of the implementation of one of these land reclamation projects exists, which makes possible a comparison with the execution of similar projects after independence. The *bolanha* of Bedeme on the isle of Pecixe, Cacheu Division, was one of the largest land reclamation projects at that time. The District officer, A.M. de Meireles, who supervised the work, made a detailed report on the execution of the project to Divisional Headquarters which was published as an example in the annex of the Boletim Cultural de Guiné Portuguesa of 1946. Apart from the general aims mentioned above, this *bolanha* was apparently selected because of the assumed spread effects. Bedeme was the largest *bolanha* on that island. It had been intended to divide the land in small parcels for a hundred family farms. These were supposed to be able to increase production rapidly, within only six months, providing a surplus for sale above subsistence needs, thus giving an incentive for others to follow.

The preparatory work, that is preparation of a work schedule, land survey and contacts with the population, to meet the demands of the administration for the collaboration, took only eight days. On 14 April 1946 the work started and it was finished on 12 May of the same year. On average 300 peasants (about one third of the working population) had to work daily on the project, reconstructing dikes, closing the river arms or breaches in the old dike and so on. In the end a total of 3200 ha of rice swamps, unused for the previous six years, had been reclaimed. This equaled production of 1370 tons of rice per growing season, whereas in previous years 300 tons of rice had to be imported to the island to meet the subsistence needs of the population. On the 'social value' of the project Meireles remarked that it would most probably put an end to the great incidence of migration from Pecixe and, in general, represented the most effective of all methods of technical assistance for the peasantry he could think of:

Their (the natives') confidence in our methods of colonization — which is already considerable — increased, because they see that the Government not just demands taxes, but helps them out of their crisis... the natives' comprehension of our methods of administration means that any order of the Authority will be promptly and respectfully followed (B.C. 1946,4:815). [166]

The latter remarks illuminated the way in which the colonialists tried to 'educate' the so called 'non-civilized' part of the population. Fortunately, however, this also showed the great illusion and overestimation of its own impact, a hypocritical attitude which may be typical of the development administration even today, though to a lesser extent.

During the guerilla war against the colonial power, which started a decade later, the actions of the persons involved in the very project described above demonstrate rather the opposite of peasant confidence. Even at the beginning of the project it became clear that many peasants resisted participation. About fifty fled to Bissau to evade conscription into the kind of forced labour which the administration had in view for them. Afterwards the fugitives returned one after another, by what means of moral persuasion or coercion we can only imagine. The present traditional king of Biombo, who participated in supervising the neighboring great bolanha of Picle at that time said, that he used to mark which peasants did not appear for work more than two days and informed against them to the local police. Normally these persons were beaten up and detained over night in prison, to be driven to the work site the following day.

Of course the labourers were not paid, but just given food twice a day. Palm wine was provided by the local rulers to the two villages which did have to participate in the construction works. A part of the labourers had to be recruited from the surrounding villages. Each had to delegate one third of its able-bodied men each week. Each labourer had to work three weeks alternating with two weeks rest. In addition 20 women had to transport rice and prepare food. Thus there was hardly any time left for other occupations during the dry season, which may have been especially hard for the poorer section of the population. They could not expect to get sufficient land from the project to cover their needs, and so had to rely on secondary income, usually from seasonal migration to the isles of Bijagos for palm wine tapping and palm nut collecting or to the Senegal.

Nevertheless this 'food-for-work' programme seems to have worked reasonably under the 'close supervision' described above, at least there were no reported desertions. As usual all the local rulers participating in the organization, especially in the recruitment of labourers, showed great zeal and dedication to the work. No wonder, because as the report stated frankly, 'they got doubtless the greatest interest in the services because they profited most' (B.C. 1946,4:813).

Most of the other land reclamation projects in the 1950s and early 1960s described in various editions of the Boletim Cultural may have been executed in a similar way. The principal characteristic, from a technical point of view, was that the traditional mode of construction of the *bolanhas* was adopted without much alteration: in modern terminology 'labour intensive intermediate technology'\*[167].

The projects certainly seem to have had incisive repercussions on the communal mode of production described above, especially on the land tenure system, as the increasing numbers of court cases in this area proved. Often the civil colonial administration had to intervene because of land disputes between emigrants and new settlers, between different ethnic groups in one village or between neighbouring villages, which all had a claim on the same parcel of reclaimed land. These disputes apparently could not be resolved by the project itself because of insufficient local participation even in the identification stage of the project. In 1973/74 the District Authorities of Buba had, for example, to readjust the division of the *bolanha* between Pete and Umbrum because the division brought about by the project prejudiced the population of Pete, the field boundaries between the Balanta of Umbrum and their landlords had to be changed as well. This question and other problems caused by the articulation of the communal and colonial mode of production will be analysed at a later stage.

### Reclamation of *blonahas* since independence

A comparison of the cultivated area in 1953 and 1976 reveals an overall reduction of the cultivated swamp rice area in Guinea-Bissau by nearly 18,000 ha or 14% (cf. Table 1). This represents an estimated decrease in paddy rice production of about 15% (from 95,265 tons in 1953 to 76,000 tons in 1976).

Table 1. *Evolution of cultivated swamp-rice area, 1953-1976 (ha)*

<i>Region</i>	<i>1953</i>	<i>1976</i>	<i>difference</i>	<i>%</i>
Oio	40.900	26.000	- 14.900	-36,4
Tombali	11.500	21.000	+ 9.500	82,6
Cacheu	28.500	18.000	- 10.500	-36,8
Quinara	7.600	15.000	+ 7.400	97,4
Bafata	14.500	14.600	+ 100	0,7
Riombo	9.000	7.000	- 2.000	-22,2
Gabu	10.100	5.000	- 5.100	-50,5
Bolama	2.600	400	- 2.200	-84,6
Total	124.700	107.000	-17.700	-14,2

Source: Schwarz (1982:7)

Each stratum of the village and each region was affected differently however. As Table 1 shows, a substantial increase of *bolanhas* is observed in the southern regions of Tombali



and Quinara. Here the state-owned *Armazéns de Povo* and SOCOMIN were buying between 1000 and 8700 tons of rice annually from 1975 to 1982, depending on annual variations [168] in production. On the other hand the reduction of *bolanhas* was especially felt in the northern provinces of Cacheu, Oio and Biombo, which at least officially did not sell any rice after independence, apart from a small amount in Oio. The clandestine movements of rice, for example across the border into Senegal, may have been considerable, however. But each of these regions received large amounts of imported and commercial rice from the international food aid programme (Schwarz 1982:21).

The reasons given for the decreasing area of cultivated swamp rice in the north since 1953 are firstly ecological and climatic, the diminishing rains and the effects of the Sahel drought as well as the subsequent salination and acidification of the rice polders. And secondly the effects of the *luta armada*, the 1961-74 war of liberation which provoked an increasing migration across the border, to Bissau, or to the south (Schwarz 1982:8). The direct effects of the war such as forced emigration of the peasants, bombardment of dikes and dams, have probably been overestimated however. They were said to be especially severe in the south, but we observed that the greatest reductions were not in the south but in the north. Hochet (1980a) states that the destruction of the irrigation systems and dikes of Como-Caiar was due not so much to bombardment by the colonialists as to the lack of organization of maintenance works on the part of *ponteiros*, the old Portuguese farmers. In addition a survey by the Ministry of Planning in 1980/81 revealed that the peasants related the abandoning of their *bolanhas* overwhelmingly to the 'entrance salt water' and lack of rain; the war was hardly ever mentioned as a factor. Therefore we hold that ecological and especially negative social and economic effects, the lack of incentives for production due to a maladjusted price policy, negative inter-sectoral terms of trade, lack of transport and basic consumer goods in the market, have had a more pronounced effect. Especially was this true in the sector of Caio and São Domingos (Cacheu Region), where it was estimated that half the *bolanhas* were still being cultivated in 1980. The percentage of villages with abandoned *bolanhas* in the different administrative sectors varied between 34% and 48% in Biombo region and 78% and 95% in Cacheu region. In the south for instance, in the sector of Fulacunda, the percentage was only 13%.

No doubt, the war had decisive negative effects on the local population working in the *bolanhas* as well. Up to now no exhaustive census of the effects of the war on abandoned territory has been made, but Hochet (1979a:26-39) provides us with a detailed study of villages on the bank of the Cumbidja river. To take the example of the Bédanda sector alone, 20 villages and their *bolanhas* were abandoned during the war of liberation; six more villages could only partially keep up the cultivation of their rice fields. How could the peasants cope with this situation after the war? When they returned to their villages they did not give priority to reconstructing their houses but to rehabilitating the very base of their future [169] existence, the *bolanhas*. In the first three years the families had to live from the cultivation of cassava and the earnings of their wives, as the salinated and dilapidated rice fields were not productive. The reclamation works were considerably hampered by the lack of manpower. Many of the able bodied men stayed in the army or in the newly-established schools, or migrated permanently to the urban centres of neighbouring countries. Thus the village of Cabedu Balante lost 25 labourers out of 72 before the war; another village, Botehe-Jati, lost one third of its labour force. This meant that the age group which was mainly responsible for the communal work of dike (re-)construction, was considerably reduced too. And in addition the family heads were lacking the means to provide the *boussa*, that is meals and drinks, necessary to invite

those groups on to their *bolanha*. All this seriously undermined the communal mode of production said to be prevailing in the south (Handem 1986:62), which had already been weakened by the commercialization of social relations (for instance the payment of age group members in cash complementing or replacing gifts in kind for the group as a whole).

These social problems were aggravated by economic restrictions imposed by the new socialist nation state, especially the prohibition on selling local rice on the free market, and a price policy unfavourable to the peasant producer. A study of producer prices in Guinea-Bissau made in 1985 estimates the net return to the producer in the swamp rice fields at only 92 Peso (P.G.) per day, whereas returns to cassava, the commercialization of which has not been regulated by the state, were 353 P.G. and the prevailing wage rate for a daily labourer about 300 P.G. (SCET AGRI, Aug. 1985:5/6). Only a doubling or quadrupling of the official producer price could guarantee labour productivity in rice production which would at least equal the current wage rate. At that time wages for hired labourers in the *bolanhas* accounted for 63% of total cost of production on average (*ibid*: 63). The latter too may indicate the high degree of substitution of communal by hired labour and the subsequent changes on the mode of production since colonial times. No wonder that under the prevailing conditions many peasants produced just for their own subsistence or even had to suffer hunger.

Because of these unfavourable economic conditions for swamp rice production, villages have made many demands for state assistance in the reclamation of old or the opening up of new *bolanhas*. In the view of many peasants it was the duty of the new nation state to compensate them for their efforts and losses during the war of liberation. Apparently the ambiguous notion of the state or development administration as a unity distinct from the peasantry, with aims and needs not necessarily shared by the peasants, a notion derived from colonial times, still holds. It paralyses local self-help initiatives, which were held in high esteem by the guerilla [170] forces during the liberation war and up to 1976, but were neglected when the ruling class realized that it no longer needed the collaboration of the people for its own well-being (Rudebeck 1982:19, 39-42).

Nevertheless the Department of Hydraulics and Soils (DHAS) of the new Ministry of Agriculture in Bissau, responsible for the planning and execution of the projects, responded to the peasants' demand. Since 1979 it has placed priority on the southern regions, presumably because of the especially grave ecological conditions and difficult land tenure problems in the north which could not be solved in the short run.

There are two categories of reclamation project: first, the 'traditional type' with simple means of production and a high degree of local participation, and second the 'modern type' with high costs of machinery and qualified labour. A preliminary survey of the DHAS reveals that between 1975 and 1983 16 projects of the latter type had been executed, covering 5169 ha. The reclamation costs per ha varied between 4458 P.G. and 6975 P.G., which was said to compare favourably with reclamation costs in neighbouring countries like Senegal. These costs were covered by heavy development aid from external governmental and non-governmental sources.

Although the DHAS had already opted at an early stage for small-scale projects at the village level with homogeneous target groups, which could facilitate the expected mobilization of the peasants, reality seems to be quite different. Despite all official declarations about assistance for self-help groups, regionalization of development planning

and condemnation of large-scale projects, there still seems to be a covered preference for 'grand' projects. One such project was the reclamation of the abandoned *bolanhas* of Como-Caiar (viewed as the cradle of the guerilla movement), included in the first national development plan, 1983-86, which took off after some delay in 1986 with an investment of some 9 million US dollars.

In view of the inadequacy or complete absence of social feasibility studies and the lack of involvement of the peasants in the project, their rate of acceptance had been disappointingly low. According to estimates from the DHAS, up to 1986 just about 40% of the area rehabilitated with the help of machines since 1975 was in use. In the Biombo region the percentage was even as low as 20% because of land tenure problems, soil acidity, lack of labour, religious-magic barriers, and so on (pers. inf., DHAS).

Besides the capital intensive projects which made integrating the population difficult, the Ministry of Agriculture aided the rehabilitation of abandoned *bolanhas* under the 'traditional method' of reconstruction described above. These were mainly 'food-for-work' programmes. The projects were executed either complementing to the capital intensive dam constructions or independently. For an example of the latter, I quote [171] again the reclamation project in Biombo region which had deteriorated so much since the great restoration by the colonialists in the 1940s and 1950s that by 1986 only a small fraction of the *bolanha* was usable. The rest was covered by salt water and mangroves due to frequent ruptures of the dikes.

Despite interim political changes at national and local level, the way this work was organized by the development administration seemed to have changed little. In 1986 officers responsible for development planning in that region still held the notion that the population of Biombo was lazy and did not appreciate the administration's efforts to help them. Peasants who did not want to attend the 'voluntary work' at the dikes were still being beaten up by the police and put into prison for one night, to work the following day under close supervision in the *bolanhas*. The supervisor of the works in Picle, the *regulo* of Biombo, was incidentally the same who had supervised the work in 1951 and 1971 under the colonialists. He earned a medal of honour from the Portuguese at that time for his 'excellent services'. He himself said that part of the population now resented his installation because of his involvement in the harsh conditions of supervision under the Portuguese. But the administration had apparently no equally qualified person to offer. And since after being temporarily deposed as local ruler, he was newly installed and even became a party member, the local power elite did not object either. The Ministry even pays him a small remuneration for his supervision.

When the reclamation started at the end of February 1986, only 50 to 60 of the 114 families expected to participate in the works were represented on the work site. Normally they had to work ten hours a day without break, as the supervisor said. But when we visited the place one morning, the first labourers did not arrive until about 10.30 am. No wonder, because the incentive was not great. First, the food promised by the Ministry came late and was insufficient. Apart from some tins of oil and fish, just 15 bags (45 kg) of rice were provided for 50 to 70 labourers for 45 days, a ration of just 230 to 330 gr per labourer per day, which compares unfavorably with the daily rate of twice 400 gr. under the colonial regime. Second, the motivation to participate in the work is partly political (for example the national youth organization, JAAC, made some campaigns to assist in the work), partly dependent on the economic benefit derived from the project.

The underlying assumption was that every proprietor of one part of *corda* of the dike (about 15 to 30 m) had equal access to the area cultivated. But the latter depended on the labour force (family or non-family) which the owner commanded in the initial stage of clearing the mangrove within the new *bolanha*. This labour force varied of course. If the final yield of one *corda* of *bolanha* varies between 20 and 300 bushels per production unit, how could one reasonably expect the peasant who harvests only 20 [172] bushels, not even meeting his subsistence needs and obligating him to seek secondary sources of income, to have the same interest in the *bolanha* as a rich full-time farmer, who harvests 300 bushels? The main reason of the low participation in this project was however according to the President of the Regional Council of Biombo, that only the old proprietors of the *bolanha* would be entitled to the newly reclaimed land. The others had to rent the land at the price of one cow for the cultivation of one *corda* for five years. These contracts, however, carry a great risk. If the soil remains fertile, if the rains are sufficient and come in time, and if there is no break in the dike, the contract could yield a profit. But past experience showed this to be highly unlikely. Therefore some 'politically advanced' villagers like the President himself and members of the JAAC participated voluntarily in the project for two or three days without any economic benefit, but similar political consciousness could hardly be expected from the majority of the villagers.

In view of the poor participation, the project supervisor thought of renewing his list of missing labourers. Finally even prisoners from the regional prison in Quinhamel had to work on the dike. During June 1986 I met six prisoners, all of them members of the *yangue-yangue*, a religious political movement forbidden in the country, working under the supervision of local *homens grandes* (village elders) on the re-enforcement of the dike. In March/April of the same year another group of 14 *yangue-yangue* prisoners were employed. The use of forced labour in the project is an especially delicate question, not just because of the reminiscences of colonial times, but also because the *yangue-yangue* could be considered a grassroots political movement which had originally sprung up in response to the disappointment of villagers - especially women - at the unfulfilled promises of the liberation movement and the new socialist state (cf. Jong 1987).

In all 519 ha were reclaimed in the 1985/86 campaign in Biombo region under the 'traditional' method (pers. inf., DHAS). Similar projects were carried out in other parts of the country, presumably in the north, but since 1983 also in Tite (Quinara region), thanks to the provision of food by the food aid programme of PAM. Unfortunately, statistics are not yet available to quantify these projects.

Besides the 'traditional type' rehabilitation of the DHAS, the Integrated Rural Development Project of the regions of Cacheu, Oio, and Biombo has implemented about 30 land reclamation projects with a total of 5683 ha since 1978. Its rate of acceptance or utilization too is very low. In 1984 on average 35% of the newly gained *bolanhas* lay idle. The main reasons given were again land tenure disputes, toxidity of the soil, lack of labour and religious-magical problems. Details of the social aspect of this lack of acceptance are insufficiently known but are being investigated (SAWA 1985; 1985a). [173]

## Conclusion

A comparative analysis of the implementation of land reclamation projects during colonial and post-colonial times reveals astonishing similarities: especially the centralization of development efforts in the hands of administrators disconnected from the grassroots, lack of target group analysis and misconceptions about the aims and needs, as well as the resources, of the population involved in the development efforts, on the part of the administration. The effects of this negative conditioning process of 'development' over many years on the chances of cooperation between peasants and the administration are still largely unknown. Any development planner who wants to encourage the local population to take their future into their own hands, would have to take account of this negative conditioning process.

## Notes

1. cf. footnote 245 by P. Hair in Donelha (1625/1927:297); the Creole term *bolanha* seems to be of Mandinge origin.
2. *Fidi tchon* in Creole, i.e. 'to dig the first hole' by the *regulo* at the beginning of each growing season.
3. Much information on the reclamation of *bolanhas* in colonial times has been collected from the *Boletim Cultural de Guine Portuguesa* (in the text abbreviated as B.C.), and on similar projects after independence from the *Balances Annuais* of the DHAS (*Departamento de Hidraulica Agricola e Solos*), see also FAO/DHAS (1983). References to these sources are only made in case of literal quotations, translated from the Portuguese by the author.
4. In 1968 the reports mentioned for the first time the utilization of caterpillars for the reclamation of the *bolanha* of Jaal-Impagina in Safim District. In the campaign of 1969/70 about 880 ha of *bolanhas* were reclaimed with the help of the machine park of the Colonial Agricultural Service. Later on land reclamation projects were even postponed because of a lack of tractors for construction. This may indicate a shift to a more capital intensive technology of land reclamation, implying less local participation which seems quite a reasonable assumption under the then prevailing conditions of 'social insecurity' in the countryside due to the war of liberation. But the scanty information available does not allow a definite conclusion.

## References

- Cabral, A. (1956), Recenseamento Agrícola da Guiné - Estimativa em 1953, *Boletim Cultural* (B. C.), 1956 (43), 7-51
- Carreira, A. (1946), Alguns aspectos do regime jurídica da propriedade imobiliária dos Manjacos, B. C., 1946 (4), 707-712
- Carreira, A. (1951), Relatório das gerencias de 1949 e de 1950, (Texeira Pinto/Cachungo), unpublished
- Donelha, A. (1625), *Descricao da Serra Leoa e dos rios de Guine do Cabo Verde*, re-edition, 1977, (Lisboa: Junta de Investigação Científica do Ultramar)
- FAO/DHAS (1983), *Mises en valeur des terres de mangrove pour la riziculture dans*

*les regions de Tombali et Quinara* (Bissau: MDR)

Faro, J. (1958), Os problemas de Bissau, Cacheu e suas dependencias vistos em 1831 por Manuel Marins, B.C., 1958(50), 2:13-216

Handem, D.L. (1986), O arroz ou a identidade Balant a Brassa,. Revista de *Estudos Guineenses*, SORONDA, 1986(1), 55-67

Hochet, A.M. (1979a), Etudes socio-économiques conduites dans les regions de Tombali et Buba: Les villages exploitant les rizieres des bords du rio Cumbidja (Bissau: CCEP)

Hochet, A.M. (1979b), Etudes socio-économiques conduites dans les regions de Tomtali et de Quinara - Sud-Ouest - Synthese (Bissau: CCEP)

Hochet, A.M. (1980), *Les Ex-Royaumes Pepel du Tor et du Biombo* (Bissau: CCEI)

Hochet, A.M. (1980a), *Etude socio-économique conduite dans les iles de Komo et de Cayaren préparation au réaménagement du barrage de N'Comene* (Bissau: CCEP)

Hochet, A.M. (1980b), *L'émigration Manjaque et ses conséquences sociales et économiques*. (Bissau: CCEP)

Jong, J. T. de (1987), 'Jangue Jangue': la politique par le bas en Guinée-Bissau (1). *Politique Africaine*, 1987: 108-112

Mota, A. et al (1948), A habitação indígena - Guine-Portuguesa, *Centra de Estudos da Guine-Portuguesa*, N° 7 (Bissau)

Mota, A. (1950), A agricultura de Brames e Balantes vista através da fotografia aérea, B.C., 1950(18), 131-172

Mota, A. (1951), Notas sobre o povamento e da agricultura indígena na Guiné-Portuguesa, B.C., 1951(23), 657-680

Mota, A. (1954), *Guiné-Portuguesa*, 2 vols, (Lisboa: Agência Geral do Ultramar)

No Pintcha, official government newspaper (Bissau), various volumes

Ribeiro, C.R. (1985), A chuva, cerne do desenvolvimento, *Africa Journal*, 6/11/1985

Rudebeck, L. (1982), Problèmes de pouvoir populaire et de développement – Transition difficile en Guinée-Bissau, *Scandinavian Inst. of African Studies, research report no. 63*, (Uppsala)

Santareno, J. (1957), A agricultura na Guiné-Portuguesa, B.C., 1957, 355-383

SAWA (1985), Projeto de recuperação de bolanhas – Missão consultativa para a bolanha João Landim/Buba. PDRI-Zena I, Buba, Dec. 1985

SCET AGRI (1985), Etude des prix et incitations aux producteurs ruraux, document provisoire (Bissau: MCEPCI)

Schwarz, C. (1982), *Estatística do arroz na Guine-Bissau, 1981*, MDR, ENTA '782/08, Bissau.